

Dobell, Sydney Thompson
Home in war time

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1900

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ems by Sidney Dobell
lected by W. G. Hutchison



LONDON: ELKIN MATHEWS, VIGO STREET, W.



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HOME IN WAR TIME

HOME IN WAR TIME

POEMS

BY

SYDNEY DOBELL

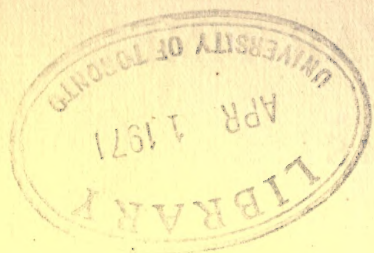
SELECTED AND EDITED BY

WILLIAM G. HUTCHISON

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Preface

OF the poetry of war there is no dearth in literature; the Song of the Sword is the oldest of all songs—older even than the song of the love of men and women. From dead immemorial ages to our own time the clash of steel has been the readiest of inspirations. Like making love, making war is one of those primal instincts that lurk in the heart of the most civilised of us: war—have we not seen it patently through these last few crowded months?—is still the great game, for the privilege of playing at which men will cheerfully sacrifice comfort, prosperity, home ties, life itself. And surely the great game deserves its meed of lyric celebration. But the delight of conflict, the grim horror of the stricken field, are but one side to war: there remains home in war time—home, and those who wait and watch at home. The

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Motherland is proud to send forth her sons, but to the pride of Motherhood are joined the anxiety, the strain of yearning and hoping, the tears for the valorous dead that Motherhood must learn to bear. The bullets carry far. It is mainly to this aspect of war that the following poems, written during the Crimean struggle, are devoted. The work of a man of singularly sensitive nature, they seem to me—despite obvious shortcomings—a psychological commentary, full of interest to us just now, on a notable period of national stress.

The tale of the author's life is soon told. Born in Kent in 1824, he spent most of his youth in Cheltenham, to which his father, a remarkable combination of wine merchant and speculative theologian, removed while Sydney Dobell was still a child. He married at the age of twenty, published his first and most successful poem, "The Roman," six years later, made the acquaintance of many of the eminent writers of the time, including Browning,

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Tennyson, Carlyle, Ruskin, and Rossetti, and in 1853 disappointed most of his admirers by his second long poem, "Balder." A three years' stay in Scotland was the means of his making a new circle of friends, the most intimate being Alexander Smith of meteoric fame, with whom he wrote "Sonnets on the War" (1855), from which, with the volume entitled "England in Time of War" (1856), the lyrics in this little book are selected. Not long afterwards Dobell's health broke down, and for the rest of his life—he died in 1874—he had to desist almost entirely from authorship, though his interest in literature, philosophy, and social politics remained keen and intelligent to the last.

Despite the contemporary chorus of laudation that he won, Dobell was by no manner of means a great poet. That he was an inspired poet I would not for a moment deny; but inspiration, after all, is but half the birthday gift that the good fairy leaves with the great singer—she also leaves the faculty of rigorous self-judgment.

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And that was what Dobell never possessed. He had an aesthetic conscience that was easy of satisfaction, an exuberant fertility of production that knew naught of the restraints of a cultivated taste. Apparently all that occurred to him flowed from his pen upon the paper without the intervention of any real process of selection and arrangement. Inspiration streamed on him, but it passed through his system unfiltered. Never was a poet more emphatically born not made. One may grant that he was a singer by nature, singing because a spirit within him demanded utterance; but nature, science tells us, is terribly wasteful—a very prodigal in squandering her means to gain her ends. And, by analogy, we find this son of hers pouring forth words like water, never using one where six would serve equally well.

Stated barely, Dobell's is the poetry of the purple patch. There are lines of his Miltonic in solemn harmony, lines that fall on the ear with the august majesty of a full chord thun-

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dered by the orchestra in a Beethoven symphony. But a symphony of Beethoven's is a whole, lacking nothing for completeness—a poem by Dobell is too often a mere jungle of verbiage, through which the only inducement to plod one's way is the number of fine thoughts and fine images that are scattered haphazard about it. Incidental fine thoughts and fine phrases are not of themselves sufficient; in a great poem they must be deliberate and form an integral part of the whole. Such unity of construction is in much of Dobell's work wanting; we have the materials for poetry rather than poetry itself. An almost total lack of humour, moreover, handicapped him, as it handicaps everyone incapable of self-criticism; hence a tendency, shared with his friend Alexander Smith, to an extravagance of metaphor and simile,* which not

* As for example this, taken from "England in Time of War":

"Thou observant moon
That dancest round the seasonable earth
As David round the Ark."

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infrequently provokes a smile rather than impresses, hence, also, his anticipation of the poetry of the French *Décadents* in his love of words for their mere sound apart from all meaning. A selection from his verse might be compiled, for which the alternative title of the "Bab Ballads"—"Much Sound and Little Sense"—would serve fittingly as name. By him the trick of onomatopoeitic iteration, a device plausible enough if sparingly employed, was worked to death. With its aid he crossed the border line that divides poetry from music, a frontier that requires strict watching on either side, and tried to make words perform the functions of musical notes and combinations. To illustrate this, one needs but mention his lyric briefly entitled "Wind," in the six verses of which the word "wold" occurs forty-two times, and the interjection "Oh!" twenty-nine. For Dobell the sane criticism of the "Laokoon" was written in vain.

Thus far I have spoken mainly of the blemishes of our poet's work, and dwelt on

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the inequality which is its first characteristic. But this statement of inequality implies that he was not a mere poetaster, to be dismissed to the limbo of undistinguished minor verse. Like the infinitely greater poet from whose pen came both the "Ode on Intimations of Immortality" and the "Ecclesiastical Sonnets," Dobell trod the heights as well as the valleys. If he were capable of writing and permitting to be printed such rollicking inanity as "The Recruits' Ball," such morbid sentimentalism as "The Captain's Wife," he was also capable of "Keith of Ravelston," with its haunting cadences and weird suggestiveness, and of the dignified simplicity of "Tommy's Dead." Had he, indeed, written nothing more than this last, his name would be worthy of remembrance. To one reader, at least, it recalls the great closing scene of "Lear."

What, then, is to be put to Dobell's credit side? First let it be said that he was a man of lofty nature, held in good report by everyone

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who knew him, beloved by every friend, apparently without a single private enemy. Chivalrous and transparently candid as he was, he could be moved to noble indignation in noble causes. Than he, oppressed Italy had no truer champion in England, and his devotion to her interests, first given voice in "The Roman," survived till the end through all the various phases through which his thought passed, from Democratic Radicalism to the broad Conservatism which, in part owing to Carlyle's influence, became his political creed in later years. The poetry of a man such as this, if he be dowered with a rich imagination and a capacity for thinking out great themes and appreciating large issues, must needs be of import. As I have noted, he was unable to look upon his own work critically, and trim the exuberance of what he had to say. But he *had* something to say—therein differing from some poets one could name, of more accomplished artistry—and for that let us be thankful. Considering the case from another

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point of view, it is only fair to a man of great gifts to remember that his literary labours closed while he was still comparatively young. Had health permitted him, who can say to what heights he might have attained? In art, greatness may come late in life. If Verdi had ceased work at 35 his name would have gone down to posterity attached to nothing more than the jingling prettiness of "Ernani" and "Mac-betto"—we should never have known the composer of "Otello" and "Falstaff." And so, had Dobell been granted health and old age, he might have won a far higher place in English literature than that which he actually holds. Of the work he would have produced had a noble economy of expression been ultimately his, one may judge from his sonnets. It is in the sonnet, I think, where he is bound by certain very definite rules, that Dobell reaches his highest level of sustained excellence—it might almost be said, grandeur.

Apart from the purely literary merits of the

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lyrics which follow, there is a quality in them which no doubt will touch sympathetic chords in many hearts at the present time. The war, which as I write is being waged in South Africa, has taught us some new lessons, and it has confirmed several old truths. Chief among the latter is the vitality of the fighting spirit in our British race, its power of long suffering endurance, its redoubled energy under the salutary influence of defeat. The men who kept the flag flying at Ladysmith and Kimberley and Mafeking, the men of the Tugela and Modder, are the same men after all as those who, when Dobell was writing, were defending their country's honour on the frozen hill-sides of the Crimea. It is only the accessories that have altered. And, so far as thought and feeling go, England in time of war, 1899—1900, has, I take it, a fairly close resemblance to England in time of war, 1854—1855.

W. G. H.

April, 1900.

L'Avenir

I saw the human millions as the sand
Unruffled on the starlit wilderness.
The day was near, and every star grew less
In universal dawn. Then woke a band
Of wheeling winds, and made a mighty stress
Of morning weather ; and still wilder went
O'er shifting plains, till, in their last excess,
A whirlwind whirled across the whirling land.
Heaven blackened over it ; a voice of woes
Foreran it ; the great noise of clanging foes
Hurtled behind ; beneath the earth was rent,
And howling Death, like an uncaverned beast,
Leaped from his lair. Meanwhile morn oped
the East,
And thro' the dusty tumult God arose.

A Statesman

CAPTAIN be he, my England, who doth know
Not careful coasts, with inland welcomes warm ;
But who, with heart infallible, can go
Straight to the gulf-streams of the World, where
 blow
The inevitable Winds. Let cockles swarm
The sounded shores. He helms Thee, England !
 who,
Faced by the very Spirit of the Storm,
Full at the phantom drives his dauntless prow !
And tho' the Vision rend in racks of blood,
And drip in thunder from his reeling spars,
The compass in his hand, beholds the flood
Beneath, o'er-head the everlasting stars
Dim thro' the gory ghost ; and calm in these,
Thro' that tremendous dream sails on to happier
 seas.

Liberty to M. le Diplomate

THOU fool who treatest with the sword, and not
With the strong arm that wields it! Thou
insane

Who seest the dew drops on the lion's mane,
But dost forget the lion! Oh thou sot,
Hugging thy drunken dream! Thou idiot
Who makest a covenant against the rain
With autumn leaves! Thou atheist who dost
chain

This miserable body that can rot,
And thinkest it Me! Fool! for the swordless
arm

Shall strike thee dead. Madman, the lion wakes,
And with one shake is dry. Sot, the day breaks
Shall sober even thee. Idiot, one storm
And thou art bare. Atheist, the corse is thine,
But lo, the unfettered soul immortal and divine!

The Botanist's Vision

THE sun that in Breadalbane's lake doth fall
Was melting to the sea down golden Tay,
When a cry came along the peopled way,
"Sebastopol is ours!" From that wild call
I turned, and leaning on a time-worn wall
Quaint with the touch of many an ancient day,
The mappèd mould and mildewed marquetry
Knew with my focussed soul; which bent down
all

Its sense, power, passion, to the sole regard
Of each green minim, as it were but born
To that one use. I strode home stern and hard;
In my hot hands I laid my throbbing head,
And all the living world and all the dead
Began a march which did not end at morn.

The Common Grave

LAST night beneath the foreign stars I stood
And saw the thoughts of those at home go by
To the great grave upon the hill of blood.
Upon the darkness they went visibly,
Each in the vesture of its own distress.
Among them there came One, frail as a sigh,
And like a creature of the wilderness
Dug with her bleeding hands. She neither cried
Nor wept; nor did she see the many stark
And dead that lay unburied at her side.
All night she toiled, and at that time of dawn,
When Day and Night do change their More
and Less,
And Day is More, I saw the melting Dark
Stir to the last, and knew she laboured on.

Esse et Posse

THE groan of fallen Hosts; a torrid glare
Of cities; battle-cries of Right and Wrong
Where armies shout to rocking fleets that roar
On thundering oceans to the thundering shore,
And high o'er all—long, long prolonged, along
The moaning caverns of the plaining air,—
The cry of conscious Fate. The firmament
Waves from above me like a tattered flag;
And as a soldier in his lowly tent
Looks up when a shot strikes the helpless rag
From o'er him, and beholds the canopy
Of Heaven, so, sudden to my startled eye,
The Heavens that shall be! The dream fades.
I stand
Among the mourners of a mourning land.

A Health to the Queen

WHILE the thistle bears
Spears,
And the shamrock is green,
And the English rose
Blows,
A health to the Queen!
A health to the Queen, a health to the Queen!
Fill high, boys, drain dry, boys,
A health to the Queen!

The thistle bears spears round its blossom,
Round its blossom the shamrock is green,
The rose grows and glows round the rose in its
bosom,
We stand sword in hand round the Queen!

A HEALTH TO THE QUEEN

Our glory is green round the Queen!
We close round the rose, round the Queen!
The Queen, boys, the Queen! a health to the
Queen!
Fill high, boys, drain dry, boys,
A health to the Queen!

Last post I'd a note from that old aunt of mine,
'T was meant for a hook, but she called it a line;
She says, I don't know why we're going to fight,
She's sure I don't know—and I'm sure she's
quite right;
She swears I haven't looked at one sole protocol;
Tantara! tantara! I haven't, pon my soul!
Soho, blow trumpeter,
Trumpeter, trumpeter!
Soho, blow trumpeter, onward's the cry!

A HEALTH TO THE QUEEN

Fall, tyrants, fall—the devil care why!

A health to the Queen; a health to the Queen!

Fill high, boys, drain dry, boys,

A health to the Queen!

My granny came down—‘pour vous voir, mon
barbare,’

She brought in her pocket a map—du Tartare—

Drawn up, so she vowed, ‘par un homme ah!
si bon!’

With a plan for campaigning old Hal, en haut
ton.

With here you may trick him, and here you may
prick him,

And here—if you do it en roi—you may lick him,

But there he is sacred, and yonder—Oh, la!

He’s as dear a sweet soul as your late grandpapa!

Soho, blow trumpeter,

A HEALTH TO THE QUEEN

Trumpeter, trumpeter !

Blow the charge, trumpeter, blare, boy, blare !

Fall, tyrants, fall—the devil care where !

A health to the Queen, a health to the Queen !

Fill high, boys, drain dry, boys,

A health to the Queen !

My cousin, the Yankee, last night did his best

To prove 'the Czar—bless you's—no worse than
the rest.'

We wheeled the decanters out on to the lawn,

And he argued—and spat—in a circle till dawn.

Quoth I, 'If the game's half as thick as you say,

The more need for hounds, lad ! Hunt's up !

Harkaway !'

Soho, blow trumpeter !

Trumpeter, trumpeter !

A HEALTH TO THE QUEEN

Tally-ho, trumpeter, over the ditch—
Over the ditch, boys, the broad ditch at Dover!
Hands slack, boys, heels back, boys,
Yohoicks! we're well over!
Soho, blow, trumpeter! blow us to cover!
Blow, boy, blow,
Berlin, or Moscow,
Schœnbrun, or Rome,
So Reynard's at home,
The devil care which!
Hark, Evans! hark, Campbell! hark, Cathcart!
—Halloo!
Heydey, harkaway! good men and true!
Harkaway to the brook,
You won't land in clover!
Leap and look!
High and dry!

A HEALTH TO THE QUEEN

Tantivy, full cry !
Full cry up the hill !
Hurrah, and it's over !
A burst and a kill.
While the thistle bears
Spears,
And the shamrock is green,
And the English rose
Blows,
A health to the Queen !
A health to the Queen, a health to the Queen !
Fill high, boys, drain dry, boys,
A health to the Queen !
The Queen, boys, the Queen ! the Queen, boys,
the Queen !
Full cry, high and dry, boys,
A health to the Queen !

The Market-Wife's Song*

THE butter an' the cheese weel stowit they be,
I sit on the hen-coop the eggs on my knee,
The lang kail jigs as we jog owre the rigs,
The grey mare's tail it wags wi' the kail,
The warm simmer sky is blue aboon a',
An' whiddie, whuddie, whaddie, gang the auld
wheels twa.

* In several of the Scottish songs of this volume, the author wishes, notwithstanding whatever *couleur locale* they may possess, to be understood as speaking rather for a class than a locality. As most of the English provincial dialects are poetically objectionable, and are modifications of tongues which exist more purely in the 'Lallans' of Scotland, it seemed to him that when expressing the general peasant life of the empire he might employ the central truth of that noble Doric which is at once rustic and dignified, heroic and vernacular.

THE MARKET-WIFE'S SONG

I sit on the coop, I look straight before,
But my heart it is awa' the braid ocean owre,
I see the bluidy fiel' where my ain bonny chiel',
My wee bairn o' a', gaed to fight or to fa',
An' whiddie, whuddie, whaddie, gang the auld
wheels twa.

I see the gran toun o' the big forrin' loun,
I hear the cannon soun' I see the reek aboon;
It may be lang John lettin' aff his gun,
It may be the mist—your mither disna wist—
It may be the kirk, it may be the ha',
An' whiddie, whuddie, whaddie, gang the auld
wheels twa.

An' I ken the Black Sea, ayont the rock o' dool,
Like a muckle blot o' ink in a buik fra' the
schule,

THE MARKET-WIFE'S SONG

An' Jock! it gars me min' o' your buikies lang
syne,
An' mindin' o' it a' the tears begin to fa',
An' whiddie, whuddie, whaddie, gang the auld
wheels twa.

Then a bull roars fra' the scaur, ilka rock 's a
bull agen,
An' I hear the trump o' war, and the carse is fu'
o' men,
Up an' doun the morn I ken the bugle horn,
Ilka birdie sma' is a fleein' cannon ba',
An' whiddie, whuddie, whaddie, gang the auld
wheels twa.

Guid Heavens! the Russian host! We maun
e'en gie up for lost!
Gin ye gain the battle hae ye countit a' the cost?

THE MARKET-WIFE'S SONG

Ye may win a gran' name, but wad wee Jock
come hame?

Dinna fecht, dinna fecht! there's room for
us a',

An' whiddie, whuddie, whaddie, gang the auld
wheels twa.

In vain, in vain, in vain! They are marchin'
near and far!

Wi' swords an' wi' slings an' wi' instruments of
war!

Oh, day sae dark an' sair! ilka man seven feet
an' mair!

I bow my head an' say, 'Gin the Lord wad
smite them a'!'

An' whiddie, whuddie, whaddie, gang the auld
wheels twa.

THE MARKET-WIFE'S SONG

Then forth fra' their ban' there steps an armed
man,

His tairge at his breast an' his claymore in his
han',

His gowd pow glitters fine an' his shadow fa's
behin',

I think o' great Goliath as he stan s before them a',
An' whiddie, whuddie, whaddie, gang the auld
wheels twa.

To meet the Philistine leaps a laddie fra' our
line,

Oh, my heart! oh, my heart! 'tis that wee lad
o' mine!

I start to my legs—an' down fa' the eggs—

The cocks an' hens a' they cackle an' they ca',
An' whiddie, whuddie, whaddie, gang the auld
wheels twa.

THE MARKET-WIFE'S SONG

Oh, Jock, my Hielan' lad—oh, Jock, my Hielan'
lad,

Never till I saw thee that moment was I glad!
Aye sooner sud thou dee before thy mither's ee'
Than a man o' the clan sud hae stept out but
thee!

An' sae I cry to God—while the hens cackle a',
An' whiddie, whuddie, whaddie, gang the auld
wheels twa.

Daft Jean

DAFT Jean,
The waesome wean,
She cam' by the cottage, she cam' by the ha',
The laird's ha' o' Wutherstanelaw,
The cottar's cot by the birken shaw;
An' aye she gret,
To ilk ane she met,
For the trumpet had blawn an' her lad was awa'.

'Black, black,' sang she,
'Black, black my weeds shall be,
My love has widowed me!
Black, black!' sang she.

DAFT JEAN

Daft Jean,
The waesome wean,
She cam' by the cottage, she cam' by the ha',
The laird's ha' o' Wutherstanelaw,
The cottar's cot by the birken shaw;
Nae mair she creepit,
Nae mair she weepit,
She stept 'mang the lasses the queen o' them a',
The queen o' them a',
The queen o' them a',
She stept 'mang the lasses the queen o' them a'.
For the fight it was fought i' the fiel' far awa',
An' claymore in han' for his love an' his lan',
The lad she lo'ed best he was foremost to fa'.

White, white,' sang she,
' White, white, my weeds shall be,

DAFT JEAN

I am no widow,' sang she,
'White, white, my wedding shall be,
White, white !' sang she.

Daft Jean,
The waesome wean,
She gaed na' to cottage, she gaed na' to ha',
Bnt forth she creepit,
While a' the house weepit,
Into the snaw i' the eerie night-fa'.

At morn we found her,
The lammies stood round her,
The snaw was her pillow, her sheet was the snaw ;
Pale she was lying,
Singing and dying,
A' for the laddie wha fell far awa'.

DAFT JEAN

'White, white,' sang she,
'My love has married me,
White, white, my weeds shall be,
White, white, my wedding shall be,
White, white,' sang she !

Alone

THERE came to me softly a small wind from the
sea,

And it lifted a curl as it passed by me.

But I sang sorrow and ho the heavy day !

And I sang heigho and well-away !

Again there came softly a small wind from the sea,

And it lifted a curl as it passed by me.

And still I sang sorrow and ho the heavy day !

And I sang heigho and well-away !

Once more there came softly that small wind
from the sea,

And it lifted a curl as it passed by me.

ALONE

I hushed my song of sorrow and ho the heavy day,
And I hushed my heigho and well-away.

Then, when I was silent, that small wind from
the sea,

It came the fourth time tenderly to me ;

To me, to me,

Sitting by the sea,

Sitting sad and solitary thinking of thee.

Like warm lips it touched me—that soft wind
from the sea,

And I trembled and wept as it passed by me.

‘ She touches a sad string of soft
recall ’

RETURN, return ! all night my lamp is burning,
All night, like it, my wide eyes watch and
burn ;

Like it, I fade and pale, when day returning
Bears witness that the absent can return,
Return, return.

Like it, I lessen with a lengthening sadness,
Like it, I burn to waste and waste to burn,
Like it, I spend the golden oil of gladness
To feed the sorrowful signal for return,
Return, return.

SOFT RECALL

Like it, like it, whene'er the east wind sings,
I bend and shake; like it, I quake and yearn,
When Hope's late butterflies, with whispering
wings,
Fly in out of the dark, to fall and burn—
Burn in the watchfire of return,
Return, return.

Like it, the very flame whereby I pine
Consumes me to its nature. While I mourn
My soul becomes a better soul than mine,
And from its brightening beacon I discern
My starry love go forth from me, and shine
Across the seas a path for thy return,
Return, return.

Return, return! all night I see it burn,
All night it prays like me, and lifts a twin

SOFT RECALL

Of palmèd praying hands that meet and yearn—
Yearn to the impleaded skies for thy return.
Day, like a golden fetter, locks them in,
And wans the light that withers, tho' it burn
As warmly still for thy return ;
Still thro' the splendid load uplifts the thin
Pale, paler, palest patience that can learn
Nought but that votive sign for thy return—
That single suppliant sign for thy return,
Return, return.

Return, return ! lest haply, love, or e'er
Thou touch the lamp the light have ceased to
burn,
And thou, who thro' the window didst discern
The wonted flame, shalt reach the topmost stair
To find no wide eyes watching there,

SOFT RECALL

No withered welcome waiting thy return !
A passing ghost, a smoke-wreath in the air,
The flameless ashes, and the soulless urn,
Warm with the famished fire that lived to burn—
Burn out its lingering life for thy return,
Its last of lingering life for thy return,
Its last of lingering life to light thy late return,
Return, return.

A Nuptial Eve

Oh, happy, happy maid,
In the year of war and death
She wears no sorrow !
By her face so young and fair,
By the happy wreath
That rules her happy hair,
She might be a bride to-morrow !
She sits and sings within her moonlit bower,
Her moonlit bower in rosy June,
Yet ah, her bridal breath,

A NUPTIAL EVE

Like fragrance from some sweet night-blowing
flower,

Moves from her moving lips in many a mourn-
ful tune !

She sings no song of love's despair,

She sings no lover lowly laid,

No fond peculiar grief

Has ever touched or bud or leaf

Of her unblighted spring.

She sings because she needs must sing ;

She sings the sorrow of the air

Whereof her voice is made.

That night in Britain howsoe'er

On any chords the fingers strayed

They gave the notes of care.

A dim sad legend old

Long since in some pale shade

A NUPTIAL EVE

Of some far twilight told,
She knows not when or where,
She sings, with trembling hand on trembling
lute-strings laid:—

The murmur of the mourning ghost
That keeps the shadowy kine,
‘Oh, Keith of Ravelston,
The sorrows of thy line!’

Ravelston, Ravelston,
The merry path that leads
Down the golden morning hill,
And thro’ the silver meads;

Ravelston, Ravelston,
The stile beneath the tree,

A NUPTIAL EVE

The maid that kept her mother's kine,
The song that sang she !

She sang her song, she kept her kine,
She sat beneath the thorn
When Andrew Keith of Ravelston
Rode thro' the Monday morn,

His henchmen sing, his hawk-bells ring,
His belted jewels shine !
Oh, Keith of Ravelston,
The sorrows of thy line !

Year after year, where Andrew came,
Comes evening down the glade,
And still there sits a moonshine ghost
Where sat the sunshine maid.

A NUPTIAL EVE

Her misty hair is faint and fair,
She keeps the shadowy kine;
Oh, Keith of Ravelston,
The sorrows of thy line!

I lay my hand upon the stile,
The stile is lone and cold,
The burnie that goes babbling by
Says nought that can be told.

Yet, stranger! here, from year to year,
She keeps her shadowy kine;
Oh, Keith of Ravelston,
The sorrows of thy line!

Step out three steps, where Andrew stood—
Why blanch thy cheeks for fear?

A NUPTIAL EVE

The ancient stile is not alone,
'Tis not the burn I hear !

She makes her immemorial moan,
She keeps her shadowy kine ;
Oh, Keith of Ravelston,
The sorrows of thy line !

Desolate

FROM the sad eaves the drip-drop of the rain !
The water washing at the latchel door ;
A slow step plashing by upon the moor ;
A single bleat far from the famished fold ;
The clicking of an embered hearth and cold ;
The rainy Robin tic-tac at the pane.

‘ So as it is with thee
Is it with me,
So as it is and it used not to be,
With thee used not to be,
Nor me.’

DESOLATE

So singeth Robin on the willow tree,
The rainy Robin tic-tac at the pane.

Here in this breast all day
The fire is dim and low ;
Within I care not to stay,
Without I care not to go.

A sadness ever sings
Of unforgotten things,
And the bird of love is patting at the pane ;
But the wintry water deepens at the door,
And a step is plashing by upon the moor
Into the dark upon the darkening moor,
And alas, alas, the drip-drop of the rain !

Tommy's Dead

You may give over plough, boys,
You may take the gear to the stead,
All the sweat o' your brow, boys,
Will never get beer and bread.
The seed's waste, I know, boys,
There's not a blade will grow, boys,
'Tis cropped out, I trow, boys,
And Tommy's dead.

Send the colt to fair, boys,
He's going blind, as I said,

TOMMY'S DEAD

My old eyes can't bear, boys,
To see him in the shed :
The cow's dry and spare, boys,
She's neither here nor there, boys,
I doubt she's badly bred ;
Stop the mill to-morn, boys,
There'll be no more corn, boys,
Neither white nor red.
There's no sign of grass, boys ;
You may sell the goat and the ass, boys,
The land's not what is was, boys,
And the beasts must be fed :
You may turn Peg away, boys,
You may pay off old Ned,
We've had a dull day, boys,
And Tommy's dead.

TOMMY'S DEAD

Move my chair on the floor, boys,
Let me turn my head:
She's standing there in the door, boys,
Your sister Winifred!
Take her away from me, boys,
Your sister Winifred!
Move me round in my place, boys,
Let me turn my head,
Take her away from me, boys,
As she lay on her death-bed,
The bones of her thin face, boys,
As she lay on her death-bed!
I don't know how it be, boys,
When all's done and said,
But I see her looking at me, boys,
Wherever I turn my head;

TOMMY'S DEAD

Out of the big oak-tree, boys,
Out of the garden-bed,
And the lily as pale as she, boys,
And the rose that used to be red.

There's something not right, boys,
But I think it's not in my head,
I've kept my precious sight, boys—
The Lord be hallowèd!

Outside and in
The ground is cold to my tread,
The hills are wizen and thin,
The sky is shrivelled and shred,
The hedges down by the loan
I can count them bone by bone,
The leaves are open and spread,

TOMMY'S DEAD

But I see the teeth of the land,
And hands like a dead man's hand,
And the eyes of a dead man's head.
There's nothing but cinders and sand,
The rat and the mouse have fed,
And the summer's empty and cold;
Over valley and wold
Wherever I turn my head
There's a mildew and a mould,
The sun's going out over head,
And I'm very old,
And Tommy's dead.

What am I staying for, boys?
You're all born and bred;
'Tis fifty years and more, boys,
Since wife and I were wed,

TOMMY'S DEAD

And she's gone before, boys,
And Tommy's dead.

She was always sweet, boys,
Upon his curly head,
She knew she'd never see 't, boys,
And she stole off to bed ;
I've been sitting up alone, boys,
For he'd come home, he said,
But it's time I was gone, boys,
For Tommy's dead.

Put the shutters up, boys,
Bring out the beer and bread,
Make haste and sup, boys,
For my eyes are heavy as lead ;

TOMMY'S DEAD

There's something wrong i' the cup, boys,
There's something ill wi' the bread,
I don't care to sup, boys,
And Tommy's dead.

I'm not right, I doubt, boys,
I've such a sleepy head,
I shall never more be stout, boys,
You may carry me to bed.
What are you about, boys?
The prayers are all said,
The fire's raked out boys,
And Tommy's dead.

The stairs are too steep, boys,
You may carry me to the head,

TOMMY'S DEAD

The night's dark and deep, boys,
Your mother's long in bed,
'Tis time to go to sleep, boys,
And Tommy's dead.

I'm not used to kiss, boys,
You may shake my hand instead.
All things go amiss, boys,
You may lay me where she is, boys,
And I'll rest my old head:
'Tis a poor world, this, boys,
And Tommy's dead.

‘ He is safe ’

‘ AND it shall come to pass at eventide
There shall be light.’ Lord, it hath come to pass.
As one day to the world so now to me
Thine advent. My dark eve is white as noon ;
My year so sour and green is gold and red ;
Mine eyes have seen Thy Goodness. All is done.

All things bespeak an end. I am come near
The crown o’ this steep earth. My feet still stand
Cold in the western shadow, but my brow
Lives in the living light, The toil is o’er,
Surely, ‘ He giveth His beloved Rest.’

‘ HE IS SAFE ’

I feel two worlds : one ends and one begins,
Methinks I dwell in both ; being much here,
But more hereafter : even as when the nurse
Doth give the babe into the mother’s arms,
And she who hath not quite resigned, and she
Who hath not all received, support in twain
The single burden ; ne’ertheless the babe
Already tastes its mother. Lord, I come.
Thy signs are in me. ‘ He shall wipe away
All tears ’ : Thou see’st my tears are wiped away.
‘ There shall be no more pain : ’ Lord, it is done,
Here there is no more pain. ‘ The sun no more
Shall be their light by day : ’ even so, Lord,
I need no light of sun or moon ! My heart
Is as a lamp of jasper, crystal-clear,
Dark when Thy light is out, but lit with Thee

‘HE IS SAFE’

The sun may be a suckling at this breast,
And milk a nobler glory. Lord, I know
Mine hour. This painful world, that was of
thorns,
Is roses. Like a fragrance thro’ my soul
I breathe a balm of slumber. Let me sleep.
Bring me my easy pillows, Margery.
I am asleep; this oak is soft: all things
Are rest: I sink as into bliss. O Lord,
Now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace.

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